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There is national security in a non-spying press too

Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said in response to the question that, yes, he is sensitive to press integrity. Therefore, he had directed that if an American news reporter is to be recruited for intelligence purposes, he — the director — must personally approve.

Several of the editors in the audience at the American Society of Newspaper Editors meeting in Washington just two weeks ago today reacted with some passion. So long as the CIA countenances the use of reporters as spies under any circumstances, they argued, the integrity of every U.S. correspondent abroad is compromised; his or her value as a writer of news is suspect both in the country in which the reporter is located and by the reporter's editors and readers back home.

Can not the CIA see the inherent conflict with constitutional principles which very plainly set the press apart from government and assign to it the role of chronicler, observer, critic and, implied, even antagonist? And this not for some special privilege for the press — not even "to sell newspapers" — but for sound reasons of establishing within the government a separation of powers, another check and balance?

Adm. Turner sat there and heard this argument spoken by several of the nation's best known editors — stated in different ways but always with the same basic message — this during what was supposedly a question and answer period but which had now evolved into a debate and an intense one. He

listened fully, carefully, searchingly, we felt from close observation. But how in the world, he wondered out loud, could the possibility that, in some special circumstance, a reporter might be called upon to furnish intelligence information to an agency of his very own government endanger that reporter's freedom — be in conflict with the First Amendment, as had been suggested by the question which began it all?

By word, by facial expression, by thoughtful pauses before he answered, it was so very clear that he was trying but that he simply did not comprehend.

Nor, apparently, does President Carter. He was asked about the exchange the next day by reporters at the White House. He stood by the position of Adm. Turner.

And so now the task lies with the press in the person of those editors — and we are among them — who feel strongly that much more damage is done to this nation by the acceptance of newsmen as spies, even in only exceptional cases — that there lies in that compromise much more danger than there is the potential for gain from the information that they might furnish.

Certainly so long as foreign governments are on notice that U.S. correspondents in their countries may also be intelligence agents, those reporters will have much less chance

of developing valuable information on their own which they can pass along not just to some government agency, but to all of the public through the columns of their papers. Certainly so long as foreign governments are on notice that U.S. correspondents within their midst may also be intelligence agents, the security of those correspondents will be in even greater jeopardy.

Adm. Turner did not say precisely, but he very definitely implied that any reporter who, in time of great need, would refuse to act as his nation's intelligence agent would be, in his mind, disloyal. And here then is the most tragic part of his failure to comprehend — his inability to understand that it could be an act of greatest loyalty for a reporter to insist that he play only, fully and faithfully the role assigned to him not just by his newspaper, but literally by the Constitution as it establishes clear divisions between the roles of citizens in relation to government and expressly makes provisions for the role of the press.

It is, of course, required by many nations that their reporters will also be their agents. Some, like Russia and Communist China simply make no bones about it. The purpose of the press is to serve the government by being a part of it. Our Constitution makes no bones about it either. The purpose of the press is to serve the government by being totally independent of it.

What Adm. Turner advocates and what the President supports, therefore, is a set of rules much more consistent with the rules of Russia and China than our own.

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